

# Sankey Canal



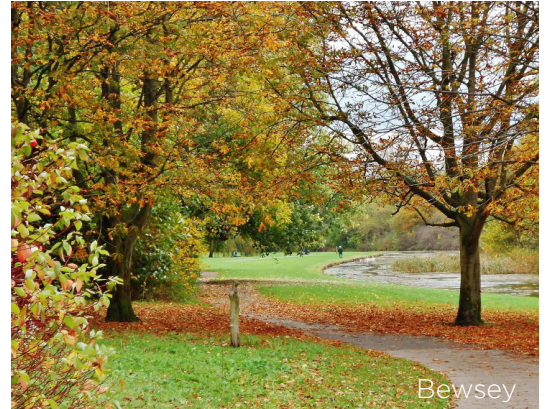
The story so far ... and stepping stones for the future



Cygnet and Parent



Heron in flight



Bewsey

Image acknowledgements:  
**Water vole and willow tit - Mike Roberts**  
**Sankey Canal Wildlife Facebook Group**  
**Our Local Voice Facebook Group**

# THE SANKEY CANAL PARTNERSHIP

The Sankey Canal Partnership, created in September 2017, is made up of three local authorities, Halton, Warrington and St Helens, together with The Canal and River Trust and The Sankey Canal Restoration Society (SCARS).

***‘The Partnership has pledged to develop the Sankey Canal and promote economic regeneration, health and prosperity for the benefit of all who live and work along its route. The ultimate goal is full restoration of the Canal – a proven way to re-invigorate communities and enrich lives’.***

Lady Pilkington, Chair

## PARTNERSHIP VISION:

To regenerate the Canal corridor and ultimately to re-open the Canal to navigation whilst:

- protecting and enhancing the corridor, particularly its rich habitat and wildlife;
- sharing the Canal’s heritage by engaging local communities and visitors in its history;
- expanding and supporting volunteering opportunities;
- maintaining water resources and managing flood risk for the benefit of surrounding communities in the region.

# PURPOSE OF THE BOOKLET

We want to make the most of our local waterways, and we would like to learn from you about how you would like to use the Sankey Canal in the future.

The booklet explains a little of the history of the Canal, and its importance as one of the country's first multimodal gateways.

It introduces you to the wildlife that can be found along the Canal, how it can be used for a range of leisure activities, and as an educational tool.

It showcases the multiple benefits of the Canal and introduces plans to enhance its appeal in the future.

Help us to save this wonderful asset so that our children can continue to enjoy the Canal and the benefits waterways can bring to the landscape.

We aim to **motivate** the local community to **learn** more about the Canal's history, heritage and ecology and become 'friends' of Sankey Canal in order to **preserve** the story for future generations to **enjoy**.

We aim to **engage** the community and **inspire** a wider audience to use the Canal corridor for new leisure activities.

Waterways bring benefits to health and wellbeing. People want to live, work and spend their free time by water. A canalside location can add up to 20% to the value of property and brings opportunities for local water or leisure-related businesses to flourish.





## THE FASCINATING STORY OF SANKEY CANAL

An Act of Parliament in 1755 gave permission for the Sankey Brook to be converted into a navigation route. Liverpool dock engineer Henry Berry was contracted to carry out the work and two years later, in 1757, the Sankey Canal opened.

Sometimes called the St Helens Canal or the Sankey Brook Navigation, Sankey Canal is England's earliest Canal and was built with three branch lines to connect collieries in St Helens to the Mersey, just below Sankey Bridges.

It is crossed at Earlestown by the first intercity railway on Sankey Viaduct (Grade 1 listed). The Sankey Brook Navigation Company objected to the construction of the railway and insisted that any structure must have 21m clearance above the water to allow fully rigged Mersey Flats to pass underneath, thus giving rise to the impressive 9 arch viaduct we see today.

In 1762, the Canal was extended to Fidler's Ferry and in 1830 to Widnes making Spike Island the site of the first multi-modal interchange, and placing Widnes firmly at the heart of the chemical industry.

Gossages Soap Works 1933



Coal was originally the main cargo, copper ore, slate, stone and manure were also important and the Canal played a key role in the industrial growth of St Helens, Liverpool, Haydock, Newton-Le-Willows and Widnes which were small villages until this time.

Sailing boats, known as Mersey Flats, transported goods along the Canal and crossing points were constructed as swing bridges to allow for the boats' sails to pass. Later the import of raw sugar for the Sankey Sugar Works at Earlestown took over from coal as the main cargo.

Mersey Flats at Dock



Sadly in 1959 traffic stopped as road transport became the dominant mode of transporting goods and in 1963 the Canal closed. Fixed bridges quickly replaced the old wooden swing bridges and in the 1970's construction of the motorway network further impacted on the Canal's decline and neglect.

But the story must not end here.....

We should not lose sight of the enormous impact the Canal has had on the development of our towns and the history of our region. It is important to preserve the Canal's story, before it is lost to future generations.

Wet Dock Locks, Widnes



We aim to **motivate** local communities to **learn** more about the Canal's importance.

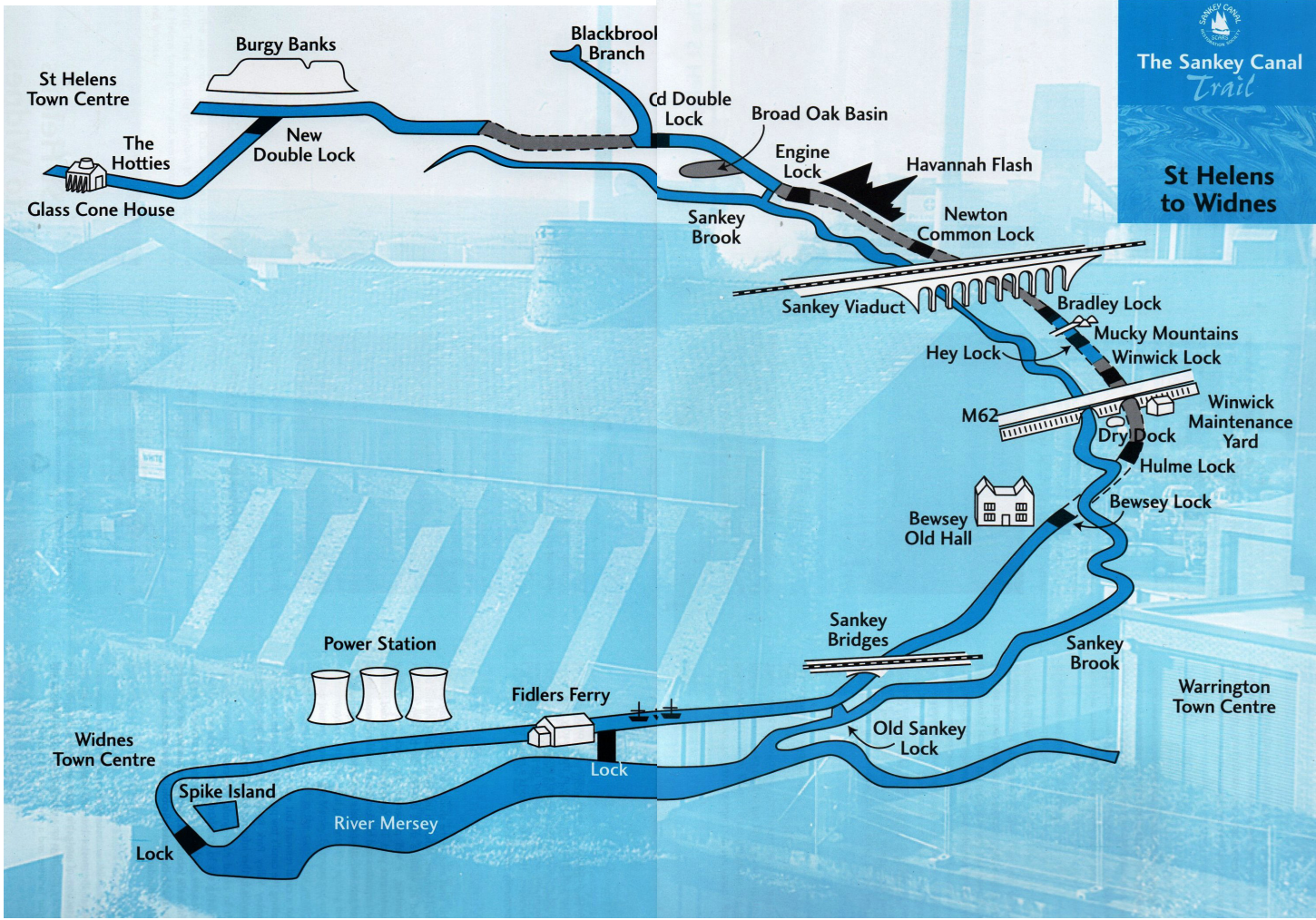


Pocket Nook, St Helens



The Sankey Canal  
*Trail*

### St Helens to Widnes







## The Ecology of the Sankey Canal

The Sankey Canal Catchment area supports a wide variety of wildlife. Some species (eg Water Voles and Willow Tits) are currently of the highest conservation concern and are included on the list of endangered species.

Historically, water voles have been widely recorded through the Sankey Catchment area, and the extensive reed beds along the Canal in Warrington and Halton are known to provide ideal water vole habitat.

Willow Tits, found in willow thickets in damp places, are widespread in the Sankey Catchment area, and the birds, their nests and eggs, are protected under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981.

Priority habitats such as wet woodlands, reed beds, and raised mires are to be found within the Sankey Catchment area, and are also protected by law.

An area of Special Scientific Interest (SSI) has been identified adjacent to the Canal at Blackbrook, St Helens.

The Canal runs adjacent to 3 local Nature Reserves sited at Blackbrook, Parr Hall Millennium Green and Mill Brow, and there are 35 sites of local ecological importance which can be linked to the Sankey Canal Catchment Plan.

We aim to **preserve** the natural environment and wildlife along the Sankey Canal, so that it can be cherished and appreciated by as many people as possible.

Grey Wagtail



Kingfisher



Long Horned Cow



Willow Tit



Water Vole





## Leisure opportunities along the Sankey Canal

Access to green space is well proven to enhance people's physical and mental wellbeing, and the Sankey Canal Corridor provides an ideal location for a wide variety of leisure activities, from walking and cycling to water sports and bird watching.

The Canal 'greenways to work' is a wonderful 14 mile long off-road green trail stretching from St Helens town centre, through the outskirts of Warrington to Spike Island in Widnes. It provides green lungs for town-dwellers to breath in the great outdoors, and an opportunity for our increasing sedentary population to keep fit and active.

Towpaths are now larger, wheelchair and pram friendly, with the all-weather paths winding through delightful woodlands, hidden nature reserves and country parks.

The Sankey Valley Trail is a beautiful green corridor surrounded by busy urban areas, offering a fantastic place to walk, jog, cycle, canoe and fish, away from the hustle and bustle of modern life.

There are also opportunities for heritage walks, photography, painting etc along the route between the Catalyst Science Discovery Centre and Museum (Catalyst) in Widnes and the World of Glass in St Helens.

We aim to **improve access** to the Sankey Canal, so that it can be enjoyed by as many people as possible.



Boats at Fiddlers Ferry



Carhouse Swing Bridge



Trans Pennine Trail



St Helens canal path



Newton Ladies and juniors

# Educational Opportunities along the Sankey Canal



The Sankey Canal runs through a diverse variety of areas, including industrial areas, business parks and areas of multiple deprivation. It is estimated that there are 47,425 residents within 1,200 metres (a 15 minute walk) along the length of the Sankey Canal.

Catalyst in Widnes, and Stanley Bank and World of Glass in St Helens together provide ideal locations for educational activities, facilitating broader access to the Canal's history and ecology, creating opportunities to volunteer, encouraging leisure usage and providing STEAM activities for young students.

There are opportunities for school or educational visits to Catalyst, Stanley Bank and World of Glass, all of which have strong historical links with the growth of the region's industries and the development of the Canal.

There are potential opportunities to learn new skills, such as photography, rural crafts, managing the environment or researching local history, bringing local communities together to celebrate their achievements and preserve knowledge for the future.

We aim to **inspire** people of all ages to **learn** more about this unique historical asset, which has shaped the history of our region, so that its story is not lost to future generations.

# Looking to the future

## What are the next steps to achieve our vision

We need your support to:


- Safeguard and enrich the Canal's unique heritage and ecology
- Protect and enhance the Canal, ensuring it is protected for future generations to enjoy
- Promote the cultural heritage so that people learn more about its history and wildlife
- Increase connectivity and to use the Canal as a green pathway for sustainable travel to work and for leisure

## Stepping Stones to restoration

Although a few sections of the Canal have been filled in and navigation severed by several bridges, much of the Sankey Canal remains in water. Studies show restoration is entirely feasible, with sufficient funding – probably in stages – but in the meantime the Sankey Valley Trail is a great place to enjoy the outdoors.

In the next few years, the Sankey Canal Partnership will continue with survey and planning work necessary for the preparation of funding bids. The Partnership aims to restore the Canal in sections, and to deliver a plan of activities related to the Canal to increase understanding of its significance and usage.

The Sankey Canal Steering Group will be working with relevant partners and local communities as it shapes this work.



We are interested in learning views on how the Sankey Canal should be promoted and used going forward?

How can we make better use of it in the future?

Please email **fundings@halton.gov.uk** with your ideas, we would like to hear from as many people as possible.

For more information about volunteering on the Sankey Canal, please contact SCARS.

Email: **colin.greenall@btinternet.com** or telephone **01744 731746**.

Website: **www.sankeycanal.co.uk**.

For more information about Britain's national waterway network, contact The Canal & River Trust.

Tel: **0303 0404040**,

**www.canalrivertrust.org.uk**



**Canal &  
River Trust**



St. Helens Council

**WARRINGTON**  
Borough Council 

  
**HALTON**  
BOROUGH COUNCIL